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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: PRESIDENT CHEN SHUI-BIAN'S CONSTITUTIONAL  
REFORM PROPOSAL

¶1. Summary: Taiwan major Chinese-language dailies focused their coverage September 23-25 on the ongoing and follow-on movements of former DPP Chairman Shih Ming-teh's campaign to oust President Chen Shui-bian; on possible solutions to the current political stand-off in Taiwan; and on President Chen's proposed constitutional reforms that touch on the island's territory. The pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's largest circulation daily, ran a banner headline on page three September 25 that read "Bian Tosses Out Topic; Territory to Be Included in DPP's Draft Constitutional Reform Proposal." The pro-status quo "China Times," in the meantime, ran a banner headline on page four September 25 that said "Ma to Take Action Today: Second [Presidential] Recall Motion Will Be Focus of Negotiations between Ruling and Opposition Parties." The pro-unification "United Daily News," on the other hand, front-paged the results of its latest poll September 25, showing that only 15 percent of those polled said they support the DPP, a 40 percent loss of support over the past twelve months. The same poll also found that the DPP's approval rating has dropped 30 percent since it came to power six years ago.

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a "Liberty Times" analysis urged the ruling DPP government to clarify to the United States and Japan the sensitive constitutional reform proposal that touches on Taiwan's territory. A "China Times" analysis judged that after having weighed the entire political situation, President Chen is moving closer to hasty Taiwan independence, using Taiwan-centered awareness as an umbrella to protect himself. A "United Daily News" analysis, on the other hand, called the unification/independence card a new trick that Chen has play so many times when he faced crises that his skill has attained perfection. End summary.

A) "Constitutional Reform on Territory Is Sensitive, Need to Clarify with United States and Japan"

Journalist Luo Tien-pin noted in an analysis in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 600,000] (9/25):

"The fact that President Chen Shui-bian tossed out the constitutional reform issue on [Taiwan's] territory yesterday has aroused grave concern and will certainly touch the sensitive nerve of Washington-Beijing-Taipei relations. Should the ruling party pass the resolution to put forward the constitutional reform proposal on territorial changes, the government has to give complete details to important allies in the international community, such as the United States and Japan, clarifying to them that the move is purely in line with [the island's] actual governance status and international reality, and it is not meant to change the status quo.  
...

"When compared with the move to cease the functions of the National Unification Council (NUC) and the application of the National

Unification Guidelines (NUG), the ruling party regards the move to change Taiwan's territory as a very important substance of its constitutional reform proposal. The Chinese side will definitely link this move to the cessation of the NUC and the NUG. In addition, Chen has already instructed his administration to assess the possibility of pushing Taiwan's bid to join the United Nations under the name of Taiwan. For the Chinese side, the move will only confirm its belief that the next step the Bian administration will take is to change Taiwan's national flag and title, and eventually take the path towards Taiwan independence. ...

"A faithful description of a country's territory is something that [Taiwan] must make in the face of international reality. What the DPP government is doing is in reality something that the Chiang Kai-shek and Chiang Ching-kuo administrations should have done years ago. Given the current sensitive triangular relationship between Washington, Beijing, and Taipei, if the constitutional reform proposal on territorial change is really as simple and plain as the ruling government claims it to be, which does not involve any long-range political objectives, the ruling government should candidly explain the issue to the international community. ..."

B) "Bian Moving Closer to Hasty Independence, Making It Difficult for Wang to Head Cabinet"

Journalist Hsiao Hsu-tsen said in an analysis in the pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] (9/25):

"President Chen Shui-bian has indeed revealed his trump card for the remainder of his term -- he is moving toward hasty independence. Once this card is played, it will give a big shock to U.S.-China-Taiwan relations. Su Tseng-chang, who aspires to the presidency [in 2008] may find it difficult to stay on in his current position, and the rumors that have been circulating for a long time, that Wang Jin-pyng may head the Cabinet, will be close to falling apart. By contrast, the chances have suddenly grown higher with regard to the rumors that either Mark Chen will head the Cabinet or that Yu Shyi-kun will be appointed as the premier again.

"If Chen touches on the bottom line of writing a new constitution, as clearly stated in his 'Four Nos' pledge, the two superpowers, the United States and China, will perhaps interfere with Taiwan's political situation. A high-ranking KMT person predicted just recently: 'Both Washington and Beijing will keep silent even if one million Taiwan people surround the Presidential Office. But both will get angry and show no mercy if Bian changes one word in his 'Four Nos' pledge!' [Should this happen], the chances will be slim for Wang Jin-pyng, whom the United States deeply trusts and Beijing regards as a target for future interaction, to head the Cabinet right now. ..."

"Chen's moving closer to hasty independence is a calculated move after he weighed the entire political situation. First, [if he does so], Lee Teng-hui, who also is calling for the rectification of Taiwan's name and writing a new constitution, will hardly be able to impede him. No matter what Lee's plan is, Lee cannot harm Bian as long as the latter stands on the high ground of Taiwan independence. Second, Bian chose to use 'his striving for Taiwan independence' as his historical legacy. He will not only not become a figurehead, but can also use Taiwan-centered awareness and turn it into an umbrella that protects him. ..."

C) "It's [Chen's] Old Trick to Play the Unification vs. Independence Card Whenever [He] Faces Crisis"

Journalist Huang Ya-shih said in an analysis in the pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] (9/25):

"For President Chen, the move to toss out the unification vs. independence issue can at least hit two targets: First, the move can divert people's attention. In the highly divided Taiwan society, once the ideological battle between unification and independence is triggered, every one will join the fight, which will naturally weaken the criticism against Bian. Second, the unification vs. independence issue will divide the public into two groups and thus shift [public argument] into the controversy over whether 'supporting Bian is akin to supporting nativism.' Over the

past six years, since Chen came to power, he has been playing and manipulating the unification vs. independence card whenever he faces a crisis, and his skill has attained perfection. ...

"The uproar caused by [Chen's move to] 'cease the functions of the National Unification Council (NUC)' in early 2006 was a one hundred percent issue of unification versus independence. Chen put out the National Unification Guidelines (NUG), which have never been applied and have been long forgotten by most people, and spent a lot of effort talking up his ideas about 'scrapping the NUC and the NUG.' After a long circle, Chen, under U.S. pressure, returned to where he started by eventually swallowing the word 'abolition' and changing it to 'ceasing.' What Chen did made zero contribution to helping Taiwan move toward substantive Taiwan independence, but Chen himself proudly showed off this result to his Green hard-cores as his distinguished performance.

"Changing Taiwan's territory via constitutional amendments is a fake topic that is almost impossible to achieve. Chen has pledged to the international community at least ten times that constitutional reforms will not involve sovereignty issues such as territorial change. Chen made his pledge repeatedly because he knew that the international community, in particular the United States, is concerned and clearly opposed to it. Under such international circumstances, can Taiwan possibly insist on pushing the proposal? ..."

WANG